

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR ZEV YAROSLAVSKY

September 15, 2009

On November 20th, 1943, the 2nd Division of the United States Marine Corps and a part of the Army's 27th Infantry Division fought in one of the bloodiest battles of World War II on the Pacific atoll of Tarawa.

The American invasion force, consisting of 17 aircraft carriers, 12 battleships, 8 heavy and 4 light cruisers, 66 destroyers, and 36 transports - the largest American force that had ever been assembled for a single operation in the war - stormed the Japanese-held island fortress of Betio on the atoll. During 76 hours of fierce combat, 1,106 United States Marines were killed in action and over 2,200 were wounded in an operation that decimated over 4,500 Japanese defenders.

The 2nd Marine Division buried their dead in 43 temporary graveyards, recorded their location and departed Tarawa the following month. Military records indicate that the surface of the Island of Betio was subsequently graded by the United States Navy during the war and temporary grave markers were replaced with proper ones.

However, when the United States Army went to Tarawa after the end of the war to reclaim the bodies, it recovered only 402 bodies, apparently because many of the replacement markers were incorrectly located. In addition to the 402 reclaimed bodies, 118 of those Marines killed in action at Tarawa were buried at sea and 88 were listed as

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RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

YAROSLAVSKY _____

ANTONOVICH _____

KNABE _____

missing in action during the war, leaving the bodies of nearly 500 Marines killed in action unaccounted for.

Recently a not-for-profit organization called History Flight began an endeavor to determine the location of the missing remains of the Marines, spending thousands of hours researching military archives, visiting Betio to conduct interviews, and employing a firm to conduct tests with ground-penetrating radar.

The researchers found the remains of some missing Marines on Betio and found strong evidence that, although some of the bodies have been accidentally disinterred since World War II, more bodies of the Marines who died on Betio can be recovered if the United States Government dedicates resources to this recovery effort.

I, THEREFORE MOVE, THAT the Board instruct the Executive Officer to prepare and send a five-signature letter to the County's congressional delegation, urging the approval of legislation appropriating necessary funds to the United States Department of Defense so that it may recover the missing bodies of the Marines who were killed in the battle of Tarawa and who remain buried on the Island of Betio; and so that it may relocate the bodies in accordance with the wishes of the Marines' families.

FGK: S:\Tarawa 2009